

DAVID AARON



Shroud Fragment

Circa 1st-2nd Century AD, Roman Period, Egypt

Polychrome painting on linen fabric, mounted on later paper

Height: 62.7 cm, Width: 44.5 cm

A large piece from a woven linen funerary shroud decorated with a polychrome painting of a female figure, most likely depicting Nut or Hathor. The figure is depicted head-on, with large, darkly outlined eyes looking directly forwards. While the eyes and eyebrows are painted in black, the rest of the facial features are outlined with a rich reddish-brown pigment, close in tone to the red of the skin. The face is framed by thick, tightly coiled hair, parted on both sides and falling in front of the shoulders in six distinct locs on either side. A white headband with a pattern of blue circles is tied around the crown of the head. The large ears, both of which stand in front of the hair, are each adorned with a gold and blue hoop earring. The woman sports a high-necked white dress with sleeves down to the elbow. The dress is patterned with red and blue bands of geometric designs and tied around the waist with a belt. Several necklaces of red, black, and blue beads are hung around the neck. Visible to the true right of the figure are three rows of kneeling adorants: a woman in a white dress, figure with a bovine head, and a large serpent. The background is patterned with red dots and between the arms and the body of the figure are drawn several black stars, possibly suggesting a cloak or blanket behind her.

Shrouds of this kind were designed to protect the mummified body of their owner, while also conveying semi-divine status in their transition to the afterlife. Egyptian shrouds from this period typically represent life-size images of either the god Osiris, ruler of the underworld, for male owners, or the sky goddesses Nut and Hathor for female owners (both of whom also play significant roles in funerary art and practices). Shrouds were laid directly on top of the mummified owner, completely enclosing their body. The painted imagery gave the body a new visage with which they could interface with the afterlife and

with those performing their funerary rites. Linen was produced from the abundant flax plants in the Nile Valley, and so was a highly accessible material; however, it is highly frangible over time, meaning it is rare to find such an intact fragment as this today.